**Mambo Italiano**
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/30618296.

| | |
|---|---|
| Rating: | Teen And Up Audiences |
| Archive Warning: | No Archive Warnings Apply |
| Category: | M/M |
| Fandom: | Karate Kid (Movies) |
| Relationship: | Daniel LaRusso/Johnny Lawrence |
| Character: | Daniel LaRusso, Johnny Lawrence, Ali Mills (Karate Kid) |
| Additional Tags: | Alternate Universe, Dancing |
| Stats: | Published: 2021-04-11 Completed: 2021-04-17 Chapters: 7/7 Words: 10175 |

# Mambo Italiano

by theremin

Summary

50s high school AU. Johnny Lawrence will do just about anything for a chance at a date with Ali Mills.

# Chapter 1

Ali Mills was pretty, blonde, on the cheerleading team, a straight A student and her dad was an attorney who worked for Disney, which meant she could go to Disneyland whenever she wanted without paying a dime. But that wasn't all. She was real nice, too, a real sweetheart, not conceited in the slightest about being pretty and smart and rich.

Ali Mills was, without a doubt, the greatest catch in school.

And being the greatest catch in school, Johnny Lawrence figured, Ali Mills was the only girl good enough for him to go steady with. Consider the evidence: he was captain of the football team. He was tall and handsome (that wasn't conceit, everybody said so). Maybe he wasn't a brain like Ali but he wasn't a moron either. And he lived up in the Hills too, he had money. Their parents liked each other and went to the same dinner parties. His mom had said to him more than once what a nice girl that Ali was, and Johnny bet Ali's parents had told her the same about him.

Basically, you didn't need to be a straight A student to figure out that equation. Johnny + Ali = true.

Only one problem.

Ali didn't wanna go out with him.

She wouldn't even tell him why. Or well, she'd make some excuses, about how they were such good friends, and he was more like a brother, or whatever, which was nonsense. They'd known each other since they were kids, sure, but they weren't like close or whatever, not playmates running around together, it had never been like that. Truthfully Johnny had never paid all that much attention to her until high school, when she blossomed into queen bee.

Johnny didn't get it. But Johnny was no quitter. Girls liked it when you chased them. But geeze louise, how long could a girl make a guy chase her before she got bored?

He looked at her, across the lawn outside the high school, it was recess and she was sitting on the grass, flanked by her friends, four girls and this one guy, a new kid who'd been bullied pretty bad until he got adopted by the most popular girls in school, like a little mascot. That was Ali for you. Always picking up strays.

“He's sitting pretty, huh?” Jimmy said, noticing where Johnny was looking.

“All those cute girls, wasted on that fag,” Dutch sighed. He'd kicked the kid around pretty good too until his girlfriend told him she'd break up with him if he didn't leave Daniel LaRusso the hell alone. That was always the way. Ali led, the other girls followed, and even though Heather Scherzinger was not even in Ali's orbit she defended the kid just because Ali had taken him under her wing.

Johnny didn't answer, only drank from his Coke. A girl with power like that. What a catch.

*

One night Johnny was driving back from hanging out with the boys, when he realized he really really needed to go for a piss. He pulled up on the side of the road and walked down to find somewhere not too obvious, stood up against the wall and whipped it out, sighing. As he stood there he realized there was something going on a little bit away. A fight. Or something. He zipped up, and then, curiously, walked towards the noise.

Someone was getting the shit kicked out of him. He squinted. It was the kid. Ali Mills' little lapdog. He guessed these guys' girlfriends didn't go to their school.

Suddenly, an ingenious plan formed in his head.

“Hey!” he shouted, and the guys – three of them, he could do three, probably – looked at him.

“Mind your business,” one of them said.

“Leave him alone,” Johnny said.

“Why? This your boyfriend?”

“Looks like he's had enough,” Johnny said.

The guy who'd spoken, clearly the ringleader, walked up to him. “Scram,” he told him, shoved him in the chest with both hands. Johnny nodded, decided to let him escalate. Which he did, he swung at Johnny, and Johnny blocked, grabbed his arm, shot a leg out and hooked it around his ankle, snapped it back so he fell right on his back. That sprung the other two into action, they ran for him and Johnny stepped to the side, dropped and swept one guy's leg, jumped back up and punched the third guy in the face, hard, the guy grabbed his nose and it was dark but Johnny was pretty sure he could see blood trickle down to his top lip. The first guy got back up and punched out and Johnny caught his fist, punched him with his free hand, he staggered and Johnny grabbed him, pushed him right into one of the other guys and they both fell over.

“Had enough?” Johnny asked.

“Whatever, man, whatever,” the ringleader said, which Johnny figured meant “yes”, and they limped off.

“You okay?” Johnny asked the kid, who stared up at him with huge eyes and an open mouth. He nodded. “Okay, cool. See you around.” He turned, started walking for his car.

The sound of quick footsteps got closer and then the kid was walking next to him.

“That was amazing, what you did there,” he said.

“Thanks,” Johnny said.

“Like, pow pow, where did you learn to do that?”

“Uh, I lived in Hawaii when I was little. This Japanese guy gave the kids lessons. It's called karate.”

“Well that was just amazing. So cool. Bet they'll think twice, before they pick on someone just minding their own damn business again.”

Johnny stopped in his tracks. “I'm no fag, okay?”

The kid tilted his head. “Who called you one?”

“Just- I'm not interested.”

The kid laughed. “You have a pretty high opinion of yourself, huh.”

Johnny flushed a little. “Why are you following me?”

The kid went quiet then, for the first time since he'd come up to Johnny. Then he looked back over his shoulder. Johnny sighed. “Okay, okay. I'll drive you home. Where do you live?”

He grinned, bright and white. “Much obliged.” He put a hand out. “My name is Daniel.”

Johnny looked at the hand, then gave it a quick shake. “Johnny.”

In the car, the kid – Daniel – put on his sunglasses for some reason (it was past midnight), turned on the radio and started turning the dial until he found something he liked, real familiar. “La la la la, la bamba,” he sang along.

Johnny frowned. “You're friends with Ali, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Gonna mention this to her?”

Daniel scoffed. “Yeah I love talking about how I get my ass kicked on the regular. It's my favorite subject.”

“No I mean, how I helped you out?”

Daniel turned his head to look at him, then tapped his chin with his finger. “Oh. Oh I see. Oh I seeee.”

“What?”

“You've been trying to get her to go out with you, huh? That's why you helped me. So I'll talk about how you're some big hero. Right?” He laughed. “Sure, whatever. I'll tell her.”

Johnny's face felt hot.

“Okay. Look, she ever talk about me?”

“She's mentioned you.”

“Why doesn't she wanna go out with me?”

Daniel shrugged. “Ever think you're maybe just not her type?”

Johnny scoffed and Daniel laughed again. “Her type? So what's her type, then? Smart mouthed little East Coasters?”

“Me and Ali are just friends,” Daniel said. “but she likes... well, she loves dancing. She loves a guy who can dance. We go out dancing all the time. Ask her to go dancing with you.”

“Dancing?” Johnny frowned.

“Hey, Johnny.”

Johnny looked at him. They were literally having a conversation. Why would he feel the need to 'hey Johnny' him. “What.”

“Think you could maybe show me some of those karate moves, some time?” Daniel looked down into his lap, folding his hands. “Might come in useful.”

“I don't think so,” Johnny said. “sorry.”

“No I get it, I get it.”

A little later he pulled up in front of a dingy looking apartment building in Reseda, and Daniel got out, grinning at him, both hands on top of the red car door. “See you around, hero.”

“See you,” Johnny said, looked after him as he opened the gate and closed it behind him. Man, what a miserable place. He turned the wheel and drove back out onto the road.

Dancing, huh.

# Chapter 2

Johnny Lawrence didn't waste time, and the very next day he walked up to Ali in the hallway.

“Hey, there!”

“Oh, hi Johnny!”

“Say, I was just wondering if you're busy tonight?”

She gave him a half-smile. “Johnny-”

“No 'cause, I think it's about time I check out The Bumblebee, uh, you been before?”

“Oh- well sure I've been, Johnny!” She smiled for real then, showed bright white teeth. “Me and my friends go all the time! It's the best place to dance in town. They play the best music.”

“Yeah well, I've never been, and uh, well, it'd feel real cool if I could go with someone knows the place.”

She tilted her head. “You like dancing, Johnny?”

“Sure,” Johnny lied. “I love dancing.”

She nodded. “Alright. Wanna pick me up at six?”

“Six tonight?”

“Six tonight.”

They grinned at each other, both of them blonde and good looking and just right, and Johnny went off for his class and Ali went off for hers. The rest of the day he felt like he could fly. God bless Daniel LaRusso. When he picked her up she wore a pink skirt and had her hair done up nice. Mr and Mrs Mills both came out to shake his hand. How it had taken Ali so long to realize how perfect they'd be together, he'd never know.

“So where'd you wanna go?” he asked when she was finally there, in the passenger seat of his car.

She frowned a little, with a smile. “Well, to The Bumblebee of course!”

“What, uh, right away?”

“Well yeah!”

Johnny nodded.

Well.

It was only dancing.

How hard could it be?

An hour and a half later, Johnny was miserable. Apparently there were dozens of kindsa different dances, and he was the only person in the room that didn't know any of them. He kept stepping on Ali's feet, and she was too nice to be mean about it but she winced and he could hear others

laughing. He kept suggesting maybe they go somewhere else and she got that angry determined look and told him no. When some other fellow asked to cut in, maybe taking mercy on Ali as much as wanting to dance with her, Johnny stepped aside.

Daniel was there, too, wearing sunglasses like an idiot (Johnny had, during the school day, realized they were for covering up a pretty severe shiner), dancing with some redhead, grinning and bouncing around like an idiot, clearly having the time of his life. Johnny walked over to him, touched his arm.

“Oh, hey, Johnny!” Daniel said. “You wanna cut in?”

“I don't mind,” the redhead said, looking up at him with big eyes. Maybe she was wearing metal shoes.

“No, I wanna talk to you,” Johnny said.

“Oh uh- won't be a moment,” Daniel told his date, then followed Johnny into a quiet corner. “hey, how are things going with Ali?”

Johnny winced. “Can you do me a favor? Tell her I left? Tell her I wasn't feeling well. Maybe one of her friends can give her a ride home.”

“Hey man, you sick?”

“I can't do this anymore,” Johnny said. “not my scene.”

“Johnny-”

“See you around,” Johnny said, and left.

Things were a little awkward the next day, Ali clearly not buying the feeling unwell lie and brushing him off even more brusquely than before. How god damn annoying. One step forward, two steps back.

Maybe he should just give up.

But Johnny wasn't a quitter, and he drove hom from school thinking, and thinking, till he hit on a plan. Later that day he drove up to the Reseda building, found the buzzer that said LaRusso. A little later the gate opened and there was Daniel, who looked real surprised to see him.

“Johnny? What are you doing here?”

“Wanna go for a ride?”

Daniel blinked. “Uh... okay. Give me five minutes.”

A little later they were in Johnny's car, riding down the highway, on their way up to the Hills.

“I got a proposition for you,” Johnny said.

“What? What kinda proposition?”

“First of all, can you keep a secret? Because this has gotta be top secret, completely confidential, you tell a soul and an ass kicking will feel like Christmas, compared to what I'll do to you.”

Daniel frowned. “I can keep a secret.”

“You still wanna learn karate?”

“Yeah,” Daniel said, nodding, a small smile appearing on his face. “you'll teach me?”

“I'll teach you,” Johnny said. “if you teach me how to dance.”

# Chapter 3

“Huh! Huh!” Daniel punched out.

“Good,” Johnny said. “try to snap your fist back quicker.” He grabbed Daniel’s wrist on the rebound. “Or your opponent has time to do that.”

“Okay, let me try again.”

“You got it,” Johnny said as Daniel jerked his fist back, quick. “main thing though is you got to keep your thumb on the outside of your fist, or you might break it on impact.”

“Yeah,” Daniel said, nodding.

“You ever actually been in a fight, LaRusso?”

“What? Tons.”

“I mean, as in one where you fought back.”

Daniel turned red. “What do you think I’m doing here? I don’t know how to fight, man.”

The ‘here’ Daniel was referring to was the guest house on Johnny’s parents’ estate. He’d pretty much moved into it age sixteen. His stepdad liked him out of the way, anyway, and he liked not having to listen to their fights. It was a small two-storey house and the top floor had once held a lounge, but Johnny had carried out all the furniture and gotten all his training gear in instead. A punching bag, some mats, free weights. It was a nice, open space, cool and good for working out. Downstairs was his bedroom, a tiny kitchen and a second room which was once a bedroom where he’d hang out with his friends. Daniel had stared at it with big eyes, it probably seemed impressive to him, the tiny guest house, considering the shithole he lived in.

Daniel had stripped down to his T-shirt and boxers, jeans not being all that good to work out in. He looked skinny and frail and Johnny wasn’t sure if he’d be able to teach him what he needed to defend himself. Obviously, in theory, a little guy like Daniel could get good at karate. Sensei Fujimoto wasn’t a big dude and in Johnny’s memory he could do incredible things. But that was years ago, and even though he still practiced the techniques as well as he could, Johnny was a big guy. He figured his technique and his strength played into each other, and Daniel would only have the one of them.

Daniel’s eyes turned to the hourglass on the window sill Johnny had turned when they started Daniel’s first ever karate lesson. It had run out of sand. Way he figured it was, they turned the glass, Daniel would have an hour of karate, and then Johnny would have an hour of dancing.

“Looks like my lesson is over,” Daniel said. “your turn.”

Johnny swallowed.

“Umm. Yeah.”

“You got a record player? Some music?”

Johnny frowned. He wasn’t really interested in music. “Uhh… I got a radio, downstairs. I’ll go get it.”

When he came back up Daniel had put his jeans back on, but he was still all sweaty, his black hair plastering to his forehead.

Johnny plugged the radio in and started fiddling with the dial until he hit on some rock song.

“Will this do?”

“Anything with a beat, I just need to like, get a feel for your level.”

“I’m not on a level,” Johnny said. “I’m underground.”

“Ah, don’t be so hard on yourself.” He tilted his head. Took a step forward, grabbed Johnny’s hands, and Johnny jerked them away, shoved him. “What the hell, man?”

“What the hell yourself?” Johnny asked, face flushing red.

“Uh- do you really expect us to do this without me touching you?”

“What do you need to touch me for?”

Daniel frowned. “You’ve been grabbing me for an hour.”

“That’s different,” Johnny said. Obviously it was different. That was fighting. That was form.

Daniel rolled his eyes so hard they turned white. “Okay. Okay, Johnny.” He went across the room, far as he could go, sat down with his back against the wall, made a funnel with his hands around his mouth. “Show me your stuff!”

“What?”

“Move! Let’s see what you got!”

Feeling completely mortified, but still determined, Johnny tried moving to the rhythm of the song. He looked down, feet moving, arms swinging. His face snapped up as he heard a snigger from the other side of the room and saw Daniel there, smiling very hard.

“Don’t laugh!”

“I’m not laughing,” Daniel said with laughter in his voice. Then he got to his feet, walked over. “you’re just a little stiff. Kinda reminded me of Howdy Doody.” Johnny’s mouth fell open. “Look, Johnny, us dancing isn’t any different than us fighting. You can’t do like a correspondence course. It’s a contact sport, right? And hey, you’re not telling anyone, and I’m not telling anyone, so what does it matter?”

Johnny looked away.

Daniel’s hands were very gentle on Johnny’s hips, then. Johnny swallowed, knew how red his face was, but he didn’t push him away. Daniel was right. He wasn’t going to be able to long distance this.

“You ever play an instrument, Johnny?”

“I tried the drums for a while,” Johnny said, looking at an extremely interesting chair on the other side of the room.

“That’s great! Then you know the most important part is the beat. Close your eyes.”

Johnny closed them.

“Listen for the beat. Listen for the drums, and better yet, for the bass. Got it?”

“Uh huh.”

“Don’t try to move to the melody. Try to move to the bass. Dun dun dun. Dun dun dun.” Daniel’s hands moved, and Johnny tried to move with them, do as he said, listening to the beat. “That’s way better, Johnny.”

Daniel grabbed one of his hands, put his other hand on Johnny’s lower back.

“What-”

“I’m gonna lead.”

“The guy leads!”

“Yeah, I’m gonna be the guy.”

“Like hell you are.”

Daniel gave him a look. “Hey, if you already know how to lead, what I’m I doing here?”

Johnny closed his eyes. “Fine!”

“Put your arm around my shoulder, like- uh, okay. Heavy. Maybe. Just hold onto my shoulder? Yeah, that’s better.” He looked up at Johnny with a real smug look on his face. “Hey, Blondie. Come around here often?”

“You know, if I wanted to, I could throw you out the window.”

“Okay, uh… well, you’re dancing with a girl, she’s gonna want you to lead. You’re the girl right now, I’m leading, which means we’re going my way, my direction, I see where we’re going and you’re just going to have to trust me. So you gotta do what I’m doing. Okay? Okay, here we go.”

Daniel sort of pushed him and Johnny tried to just yield, tried remembering to follow the beat, tried doing what Daniel did, and then he stepped on Daniel’s foot and he yelped.

“Sorry.”

“Yeah uh- maybe- maybe just, look at my feet.”

Being led was honestly kind of humiliating. Daniel pushed him around, corrected him, and then, worst of all, spun him around. But then, when Daniel said, “Okay, now you’re gonna lead,” Johnny felt the color drain from his face.

“You have got to stop looking so goddamn scared,” Daniel said. “you could throw me out the window, remember?”

“But uh- like- lead you where?”

“Well, where d’you wanna go Johnny?”

“Buzz off.”

Daniel tilted his head kind of curious. “I mean it. Like, are you just looking for a date with Ali? ‘Cause you got one, and you just left, man. She was not happy.”

Johnny sighed. “I… I don’t know. I wanna go steady with her. I wanna take her to prom.”

“Okay,” Daniel said, sounded a little dubious.

“I’m captain of the football team, she’s head cheerleader. We’re gonna be prom king and queen, and it’s just gonna be all perfect,” Johnny said. “like in the pictures.”

Daniel frowned a little. “Uh… okay, man. Well, prom is two months away, I guess with some hard work we could maybe get there. She said yes once, right? If we can get a second yes and you don’t maul her feet we might get somewhere.”

“You really think so?”

“Sure, Johnny.” There was nothing mocking in that smile.

Johnny clasped his hand to Daniel’s lower back and pulled him in, and Daniel gasped a little. “Let’s go.”

# Chapter 4

“Hey, where did this come from?”

Daniel grinned at the new Dansette record player Johnny had bought that day, alongside a bunch of singles. Not knowing a damn thing about music he'd just asked the clerk to get him the most popular ones, and maybe some recommendations that were good for dancing to. He'd picked out one of his own, too, though. He'd scanned the titles, none of them really meaning anything to him (like, obviously he knew who Elvis was but he didn't actually care about that greasy hillbilly), but then one had stuck out to him. Mambo Italiano. By Rosemary Clooney. Italian, huh... like somebody he knew. He picked it out and paid for it with the rest.

“Figured we might need something better than the radio. Too much talking on it.” Johnny handed the single over. “Here.”

“What?”

Johnny shrugged. “You want it, or not?”

“You bought this for me?”

Johnny rolled his eyes. Daniel smiled, a bright smile, holding the single carefully between his fingers.

“Um, well, thanks, Johnny! You didn't have to do that!”

Johnny shrugged again. “Wanna play it?”

Daniel looked sort of mischivious. “No, I think I'm gonna save this for when you're ready for it.”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

Daniel didn't respond, like that made him mysterious or something. Well, whatever. Over the next few days, they matched each other in dedication. Daniel genuinely did pick up technique fairly well. He was better on the defense than the offense, but Johnny figured the defense was what he needed, considering how kickable he was. He taught him how to block and weave and avoid getting hit, how to strike to buy time, and Daniel got this almost incredulous look on his face whenever he did something right, like he couldn’t quite believe it. The first time he actually landed a punch and Johnny gasped with surprise he vacillated between panicked apology and joyful celebration so quick it made Johnny more disoriented than the actual hit.

Johnny knew how he felt, though.

He couldn’t quite believe it, either, that dancing was something he could, kind of, do. Daniel had dove joyfully into his new stack of singles, made a real curriculum out of them. They danced the twist, that one was real easy and pretty fun (“Do it like you're squishing a bug with your foot! Or your partner's big toe!”), they did kick hops, which genuinely were fun, although Daniel looked kind of worried at times (“Maybe lower, Johnny.”), they did the jitterbug and the swing, which was definitely one of those things Johnny's mind boggled at him being able to do after enough practicing, he'd just wanted to give up the whole cockamamie situation after the first time they tried it. But then Daniel kinda broke it up into little pieces, and they practiced one piece long enough, then another, and then they put them together and then Johnny could actually kind of do it. Not amazingly, but he did it. Then Daniel said there was an element Johnny probably would be

really good at and that Daniel couldn't do, which perked Johnny's interest. And by the end of the day Johnny could lift Daniel and swing him from one side of his body to the other, before spinning him out, and then Daniel told him if he could pull that move with Ali, she wouldn't think twice before agreeing to go to prom with him. And then Johnny felt like he could fly.

So Johnny did steps on his way to school, he did them alone dancing to the singles before he saw Daniel at night, he kind of developed a taste in music; that Pat Boone single he'd bought made a mighty fine frisbee, and that Ray Charles song he'd bought was so good he went back to the record shop and bought a bunch more of his tunes, asked for the most popular songs on the rhythm and blues chart instead of the pop stuff. Mickey and Sylvia, The Drifters, Professor Longhair.

They were dancing to one of his latest acquisitions and praciticing the swing, and Johnny was carefully walking Daniel out, and back in, counting the steps, until the song ended.

Daniel grinned at him. “Not bad!”

“Yeah? Getting pretty good, huh?”

“You're still a little stiff,” Daniel said. “but it don't matter. You don't look like you wanna die anymore. Dancing is supposed to be fun. You only have to let go a little more, Johnny.”

“I mean, I gotta be a little careful, so I don't step on your feet.”

“You just gotta pay attention to me, Johnny. To how I move, to where I go. Control it, if you're leading. Then you won't step on me.”

Johnny nodded. Daniel walked over to the Dansette, pulled out a single, showed it to Johnny, hitched an eyebrow, and put it on. Dramatic mandolins started playing. Mambo Italiano.

*“A girl went back to Napoli, because she missed the scenery-”* Daniel sang along operatically. “hey, you know, my nonna, she's from Napoli!”

For some reason Johnny felt joyous at that fact. He wanted Daniel to like the single.

Then the song changed, picked up pace, and Daniel started walking back and forth to the rhythm, moving his arms in an angular yet fluid kind of way.

“Think you can do this?”

“uh”

“Just the feet. Don't worry about the arms. Come on. Left-right-left, right-left-right.”

Johnny swallowed, started mirroring him.

By the end of that hour Johnny was sorry he ever bought the single. But when he finally did crack the code and those steps were like, embedded in his feet, it got real interesting. To manage to do that footwork while spinning Daniel around, moving one way or the other, it felt real neat.

The last note of that final *”italianooooo”* played out and Daniel pulled away, sweaty and smiling. “Hey, Johnny.”

“What, Daniel?”

“You did that whole mambo without looking at our feet once.”

Johnny grinned big. “I did, didn't I!”

“I got an idea for our next lesson.”

“Oh, so do I,” Johnny said. “um, after school, maybe you wanna swing by the record store with me? It's um, Tuesday, that's when they get the new stuff.”

Daniel tilted his head. “Um- that- that sounds nice, Johnny! But uh- I was gonna say, tomorrow, we hit up The Bumblebee. Ali's gonna be there, Betty, Agnes, everyone. So we go, and you ask Ali to dance, and you sweep her off her feet. You're ready, Johnny.”

Johnny took a deep breath. Then he nodded.

*

Johnny had his hair slicked back, his varsity jacket on, stopped his car outside Daniel's building and honked the horn. Moments later Daniel came running out, sunglasses on even though his shiner was gone, fedora, too-big blazer with the sleeves rolled up. What a pair they made.

The Bumblebee was pretty packed, but Daniel made way, aplogised and chatted and talked their way right to the dancefloor, Johnny just following close, he was like a tiny Italian Moses parting the Red Sea. And then, there was Ali, in a white hoop skirt and her hair bouncing around her shoulders, dancing with some red haired dude.

“Here's what you're gonna do,” Daniel said in his ear. “you're gonna go over, ask to cut in.” Johnny nodded. Daniel patted his arm. “Good luck.”

Daniel slipped onto the dance floor and the next time Johnny looked for him he was dancing with a curly haired girl, bouncing around in that careless way he had. Well, except when he was dancing with Johnny. He wasn't quite so reckless then. That suddenly annoyed him. What, he didn't feel safe with him, or something? Idiot.

Then he looked over at Ali. She turned her face and met his eye then, smiled a little.

What, he was just going to go over there, tell the guy she was dancing with to get lost, and then demand she dance with him, after the shameful performance last time? He swallowed. Better wait. Better wait for the right opportunity. To present itself.

“Hey!”

Johnny almost jumped, then looked down on the freckled girl in the yellow blouse smiling up at him. "Huh?"

“Wanna dance?”

“No,” Johnny said, then made his way outside.

He sat in his car, quiet for a moment, then he hit the steering wheel with the flats of his hands, then he hit it again.

“What the wheel do to you?”

He looked up and Daniel was standing there, looking pretty cool for someone who must have run to catch up with him.

“It's just- not gonna work. This was all a waste of time.” He hit the wheel again.

“Johnny, you're ready! You know what to do! You just gotta ask her!”

Johnny shook his head, then he mumbled something.

“Um, didn't catch that.”

“There are too many people around,” Johnny told the abused steering wheel.

“Huh?”

“In the studio it's just you and me. In there it's packed and I'm not used to...” He shook his head again. “I'm going home. You gonna get home okay?”

“Yeah, I'll get a ride. But I really think you should-”

“Sorry. We might as well give up on these lessons, huh.”

Daniel sighed. “No, I got another lesson for you. Wait for me outside your house, six tomorrow, okay?"

“Daniel-”

“Come on, humour me.”

Johnny took a sharp breath, then nodded.

"It's real important you're not late, super important, okay?"

"I won't be late, geeze."

So the next night Johnny waited outside the house, leaning against his car, felt real stupid. Then a skinny, tall girl walked up to him. Real cute.

“Hey,” he said to her, feeling a little confused, when she stood in front of him and smiled brightly. Maybe she was lost or something.

“Hey Johnny.”

The voice. Johnny's eyes turned saucer big.

“Daniel?!”

# Chapter 5

"Daniel?!"

It was Daniel, alright, wearing a black wig, the hair touched his shoulders, and it had long bangs which fell into his eyes. He was wearing *make-up*, kohled black around his eyes and some kinda red gloss on his lips. He had a strategically placed thin black scarf around his neck, covering up his adam's apple, and a top which kinda gathered in folds at the front, so if you didn't know any better you might assume there were boobs under there. He was also wearing polka dot capris, which was a bolder choice considering how skinny his hips and legs were, and black ballet flats.

“Danielle,” Daniel corrected. “I'm gonna be your date tonight. We're going dancing.”

“Uh, like hell we are.”

“Not at The Bumblebee, I'm not crazy. We'll drive down to Encino,” Daniel said, unfazed. “we won't get recognized there. This way we can practice dancing out in public.”

“We'll be arrested!”

“For dancing?” Daniel tilted his head.

“No, but you- you-”

“Hey, fooled you.” Daniel grinned. “I'll keep my mouth shut, we'll be fine.”

“If our not getting arrested hinges on you keeping your mouth shut I don't like our chances.”

Daniel rolled his eyes. "Made it all the way up here without getting hassle, didn't I? Went on the bus and everything."

"For a guy who claims he doesn't like getting beat up all the time, you sure are asking for it, is all I'm saying. Look at you!"

"Okay, I'm sure there are places where guys can dance together, but I don't know any, do you?"

Johnny's mouth fell open and he was about to answer when he heard a voice call “Hey, Johnny!” and ice ran through his veins. He turned his head and his mom walked up to the gate, waving.

“Who's this?” She smiled. Thank god he'd never introduced her to Daniel.

Daniel elbowed him and Johnny swallowed. “Uhh this is... Danielle. We uh...” Daniel grabbed his hand then, leaned into his side. Johnny's face felt very warm. “we're going on a date...”

“Oh! Well, real nice to meet you Danielle!”

Daniel waved and grinned.

“She's shy,” Johnny said. Daniel shrugged in a got-me way, sort of rotated his torso from side to side against Johnny.

“Aww. Well, you kids have a good time, okay?”

“Okay mom.”

With another little wave she turned, walked back up to the house. Daniel cackled. “See?”

Johnny yanked his hand out of Daniel's grip. “I'm regretting this already.”

They drove for about twenty minutes, and it was awkward. Well, for Johnny it was awkward, Daniel was just chatting and singing along to the radio like usual. Looking like that. With his lips all full and red and that dumb wig falling into his eyes and touching his shoulders all soft and his legs all thin and long in those polka dot capris.

“Don't you feel funny?” Johnny finally said.

“Huh?”

“In that get up.”

Daniel shrugged. “Yeah, a little bit. They're just clothes though. I feel like it's Halloween or something.”

“Where did you even get all that stuff?”

“Borrowed it from my mom.”

“Does she know?”

“Borrowed as in stole, but I'm gonna put it back when I'm done with it.” He grinned.

They found a club that looked promising, and Johnny parked. Walking up to it, Daniel grabbed his arm. Johnny tried jerking away. “Stop it.”

“You stop it,” Daniel said, not letting go. “be a goddamn gentleman.”

Johnny cringed, then let Daniel cling on.

“You're gonna have to do the talking, so it has to look good,” Daniel explained.

“Okay, okay.”

“Maybe we should have had talking lessons first.”

“Hey, what happened to shutting the hell up?”

Daniel grinned and nodded his head.

“Hey kids,” the doorman said. He looked to not be long out of high school himself. “there's a fifty cent cover charge.”

“Oh, sure,” Johnny said, and paid.

“Have a good time,” he said, then smiled at Daniel. “maybe save a dance for me, girly?”

Daniel looked down, smiling. “Her dance card is full,” Johnny snapped.

Daniel leaned into his side as they walked into the club. “Nice,” he whispered.

“Shut up,” Johnny said. “literally.”

The club was pretty packed with dancing kids, and it was real warm in there. Johnny breathed in big, feeling nervous. Daniel took both hands in his (holy crap he was wearing nail polish how hadn't he noticed yet) and pulled him out on the dance floor. The song playing was kinda upbeat and Johnny swallowed, grabbed Daniel and led them into the swing. Daniel smiled at him, looking so pretty it shouldn't be allowed. He spun him around and got a very approving look when Daniel faced him again. See, if it could be this easy with Ali- Johnny suddenly realized he hadn't even thought about all the other kids in the club once, because he was just focusing on Daniel. And he'd felt all crippled by just the thought of dancing in front of other people the night before. Huh. It was probably just because he didn't know any of these kids.

Then something kinda wonderful happened. By the second song Daniel was dancing as unselfconsciously as he ever had with Johnny, looking goofy and laughing (silently, thank god), doing the mashed potato and the swim and just clearly having a good time. That must mean Johnny wasn't just a clueless student he had to watch all the time anymore, but actually a decent dance partner. But then it was time for a slowie and Johnny bit his lip. They hadn't practiced any slow dancing. He glanced over at the bar, figured he might buy Daniel a milkshake, but Daniel pulled him close, and Johnny let his hands close over the small of Daniel's back.

“You're doing so good,” Daniel whispered in his ear.

“Yeah?”

“Uh huh. Are you having fun?”

“Yeah,” Johnny said. He was, actually. He didn't feel like everybody were looking at him and judging him. He really didn't care about anyone else in the room at all. Which was quite a feat, considering he was dancing with a damn guy in a wig in a packed club. Daniel's hands were kinda moving over his back, and he looked up and around and realized a lot of couples were making out to this. He bit his lip. Pulled back a bit.

Not really thinking, he leaned forward, and Daniel stared but then he closed his eyes and their lips met soft and sweet, feet still moving slow. Daniel kissed back close-lipped but firm and Johnny could kind of feel him sigh through his nose. Then the song ended and Johnny pulled away like he'd been snapped out of a hypnosis or something, swallowed, licked his lips and felt tacky cherry flavored lip gloss on them, and Daniel was staring, and his eyes were round but his grin was very wide.

“Sorry,” Johnny said.

“It's okay,” Daniel said.

“You got me all confused.” He suddenly felt like crying.

The next song had more of a beat. “Let's mambo,” Daniel said, helpfully, smoothing over. He started moving his hips and hands in that slightly angular, but still graceful and controlled way. “Let's show these Encino kids how we do it.”

Johnny nodded, started moving his feet to the music, he could remember how it went, barely had to think about it. They danced quick and close, almost like a good conversation. He spun Daniel around, pulled him close, spun him back out. Suddenly, Johnny realized how much space they had, and looked up to see a circle had formed around them, looking at them. Maybe not a lot of people knew how to do the mambo here. Daniel looked unfazed. He was probably enjoying it, the little show-off. Johnny spun him so his back met Johnny's chest and then Daniel's hands linked behind Johnny's neck and he sagged, doing the footwork sort of leaning back into Johnny, and

Johnny managed to keep up, and that actually got them a round of applause. Daniel started moving up so Johnny helped him, grabbed him, lifted him to his feet and spun him back to face him, then lifted him again, one of Daniel's legs hooking behind his and one arm around his neck as he let Johnny do the footwork while he just clung on. The song ended and applause and cheers rang out, and the dance floor filled again around them. Daniel beamed up at him.

“That mambo was amazing, that was the best,” Daniel said later that night as they walked back to the car. “like, you improvised, Johnny! In front of an audience! I'm so proud of you!”

“Can you maybe not talk until we're in the car?” Johnny said, looking around nervously.
The juxtaposition of how Daniel looked – like a very pretty if somewhat dishevelled chick – to how he sounded – like the world's most annoying guy from Jersey – was not really something he wanted to be associated with.

“Ahh, no-one's here. Stop freaking out. Told you we'd be fine.”

"What the hell's all this?"

Johnny looked behind them, and four guys walked up, and they looked like trouble.

"Hey, little girl. Say something."

Daniel looked pretty scared, then.

"We're just heading home," Johnny said. "don't want no trouble."

"We're just trying to figure out what's going on here, because your girlfriend sounds like Jimmy Durante. What's your name, sweetheart?"

"That's not her fault," Johnny said, it felt kinda stupid and it made the jerks laugh. He walked up a little threateningly. Four. Not a great number. "Leave it."

Without warning the guy he'd walked up to punched him in the stomach and Johnny doubled over. "Get her!" the guy shouted, and Johnny exploded up in an uppercut, sent the guy flying, turned around to see one of the others grab Daniel.

And then, Daniel grabbed onto his arm, and *threw him over his shoulder*. Johnny's mouth fell open. Daniel looked even more surprised. The two guys who were still standing also looked pretty shocked. There was a bizarre and very quiet moment before one of the other guys roared and moved and Johnny moved too and swept his leg out from under him, and he looked up just in time to see Daniel duck a punch, land a chest high kick - geeze, go Daniel - and Johnny ran over, grabbed the assailant by his shirt and pulled him away, threw him to the ground. He grabbed Daniel's hand and they ran off for the car, Daniel jumped in the passenger seat and Johnny started the ignition, he knew they were being followed but they only managed to slam their fists to the trunk before Johnny hit the gas and burned rubber.

Daniel was uncharacteristically quiet in the car, visibly shivered. With one hand on the wheel, Johnny took his varsity jacket off, and handed it to him. Daniel wordlessly accepted, wrapped it all around his shoulders and pulled it together with his hands.

“Never tell me I'm no damn gentleman," Johnny said.

Daniel smiled, then.

# Chapter 6

Johnny was lounging on the sofa in his little living room, looking at a sports magazine. Daniel had asked if they could go by the house so he could change a bit before he went home. His mom was with an uncle in Fresno for a couple days, so it wasn't that, but he was clearly itching to get out of the getup and Johnny couldn't blame him. He'd borrowed him his smallest T-shirt and then he'd disappeared into the small bathroom. When he finally emerged he was wearing the shirt, his face was scrubbed and his wig was gone. He was still in the capris and ballet flats though.

"Took you long enough," Johnny said.

"Well, I had to unpin the wig. How do you think I kept it on all night?"

Johnny smiled a little. "I don't know if I told you, Daniel, but that was pretty impressive, with those jerks back there. You sent 'em flying."

Daniel just nodded, not smiling. "This is okay, right?" Daniel asked.

"Uh, from the bottom down you still look kinda," Johnny bobbed his hand.

"Yeah, I just need to get from your car to my room without anyone looking too close at me. I like my chances."

"Okay."

Daniel slumped down next to Johnny on the sofa. "So, you figure you're ready?"

"Huh?"

"To dance with Ali. In public."

"Oh, yeah. Ali."

Daniel grinned. "Was that not the point of this whole exercise?"

"I'm sorry I kissed you," Johnny said, looking straight ahead.

"Yeah, you already said. It's fine."

"I'm no fag."

Daniel rolled his eyes. "You're the one making it a big thing. So, we go to The Bumblebee tomorrow night, see if you've got over your stage fright?"

Johnny swallowed. "What if I can only do it with you?"

"Come on."

"I mean it. Like, you taught me, but you only taught me how to do it with you, and now I can't do it with anybody else. Not Ali."

"Stop being a coward. The moves and the steps are the same. I didn't invent them. You just know I won't laugh at you, that's the difference." Daniel tilted his head. "Except I do laugh at you, all the time. You just don't care. And you shouldn't care if anyone else laughs, either."

“I know you, and I know how you move. That's the difference.”

“And you'll get to know how other people move. That's half the fun of it, Johnny.” He smiled. “Now, I'd appreciate it if you drove me home.”

Daniel was right. The next night they went to The Bumblebee and Johnny walked up to Ali, who for once was not engaged already but at the bar with her friends, and he asked her if she’d give him a second chance. And she was too nice to say no. Even though it wasn't quite as fluid and easy and fun as it was with Daniel, it was still pretty good. He spun her around, moved with her. He looked over her shoulder at Daniel, who was looking at them, and he grinned, and Daniel who had been looking kinda serious half-smiled back, gave a thumbs up.

“You've really improved,” Ali said, impressed. “Johnny Lawrence, have you been taking lessons??”

“Um... yeah, kinda,” Johnny admitted. Ali laughed.

“Wow!”

“Yeah, I know, I know. Figured I needed to do something before I crippled every female I ever danced with.”

She laughed again, and that felt real nice. “Who you been practicing with?”

Johnny froze for a second. “Uh, my cousin.”

“Do I know her?”

“No,” Johnny said. “she lives in San Diego. She's just been visiting, and she agreed to show me some moves.”

“Good for you,” Ali said. “so which dances she teach you?”

“Oh uh... let's see... the swing, the jitterbug...”

“Wow!”

“The salsa, the twist, the mambo...”

“You know how to mambo?” Ali's mouth fell open, then she grinned, pulled away, walked over to the DJ. A real familiar song started playing, and Ali started shimmying over to him. Johnny drew a breath.

The steps came easy considering how many damn time he’d danced to Mambo Italiano. Johnny spun her, and she spun out and spun back again, smiling big and looking pretty. He was doing it. He was really doing it. Dancing with Ali in front of everyone. And doing it well. She was all laughing and all impressed. He looked up again to catch Daniel's eye.

But he couldn't see him there, anymore.

*

It all went kinda fast from there. He went out dancing with Ali the next two nights, and eventually she even agreed to do other stuff. She took him to Disneyland on that coveted Ali Mills free ticket. They went to McDonalds and had big milkshakes. His friends were jealous and their girlfriends tried to get in Johnny’s good graces, begged for double dates.

One night when he drove her home she turned to him and asked, “Aren’t ya gonna kiss me, Johnny?” so he did. She was all sweet and soft and her cheeks were a little pink when she pulled away, grinned at him, and got out of the car.

It had all gone to plan.

One day in school Johnny saw Daniel in the hallway, jogged up to him. “Hey!”

“Hey there,” Daniel said. “how you doin?”

“Great. Haven’t seen you around much.”

“Well, you’re busy, I’m busy.”

“Um, so, me and Ali, maybe you heard, but we’re pretty much going steady now.”

“I heard,” Daniel said in a kinda quiet voice, smiling a little.

“I mean, thank you. I couldn't have done any of this without you.”

Daniel looked down. “I'm real glad for you, Johnny.”

“Maybe you wanna come over some time this weekend, we can still practice karate, if you want? Oh and uh, Ali sweet-talks her dad a little, I’m sure we could get a third on the Disneyland ticket?”

Daniel made a face, shook his head. “This weekend? Oh man, I can’t this weekend. And about the karate, I don’t know. I was never all that into it and I think I know enough to get out of sticky situations now. That's all I need, you know. Enough of an opening so I can run away.”

“Uh... okay, if you're sure. But I think- okay. Hey, maybe we could go see a movie or something? When are you free?”

“I'm just really kind of busy right now,” Daniel said, clutching his books. “all those exams and stuff. But I'll see you around, hey?”

“Yeah,” Johnny said, looking after him as he sped up down the hallway. “see you.”

“What were you talking to that little queer for?” Jimmy said, walking up to Johnny. “You need your hair cut or something?”

Not even thinking Johnny turned and grabbed him, threw him into the lockers.

“I’m sorry, I forgot he’s your girl’s friend,” Jimmy said, raising his hands up placatingly.

“Yeah,” Johnny said stupidly. “watch it.” He patted Jimmy’s shoulder. “Sorry, man.”

*

Prom was just a week away now and Johnny was putting off asking Ali. She was starting to hint, so he wasn’t sure why he didn’t just come out and say it.

“Susie is on the committee so she already told me the theme, you wanna hear it Johnny?”

“Uh, sure.”

“It’s gonna be musicals! They got a band that’s gonna play songs from musicals all night!”

“Urgh,” Johnny said.

“You don’t have to be so negative. There’s plenty of good songs from musicals.”

“Yeah, okay,” Johnny said, in a way that made it clear he did not agree.

“Well I know you like that r’n’b stuff, maybe you could bring a single or two for the DJ to play when the band’s not on. But I think it will be fun. We can dress as characters from musicals too, it’s optional but I think that could be real fun. I thought I might get a blue gingham bow, you know, kinda like Dorothy? Susie is gonna be Calamity Jane. She’s going with Tommy Larson.” She started counting on her fingers. “And Betty is going with Kevin Willis, and Agnes is going with Matty Lister...”

“You know who Daniel is going with?” Johnny suddenly asked.

“Daniel LaRusso?” Ali shrugged. “I don’t think he’s going.”

“No?”

“He’s been kinda sad lately. I’m not sure what’s up with him, he won’t tell us.” She made a face. “I think someone hurt his feelings. We barely saw him for a while there and he was so happy, but then he started being free nights again and all he does is mope. You know he puts on this front of just being funny and not caring about anything, but he’s a sensitive boy.” She sighed. “I worry about him, sometimes.”

“Hm,” Johnny said, and drank some more milkshake, while Ali continued listing who was going with who to the prom.

# Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Johnny walked up the stairs in the Reseda building, his hair combed back and his best suit on, looked at all the doors until he found one that said LaRusso. He knocked, waited with his hands in his pockets, and then a tall, pretty woman with dimples opened up.

"Hello," she said.

"Hey uh, I'm, I'm Johnny and I'm here to see Daniel?"

"Oh- oh Daniel's not feeling too well right now."

"Just for a moment," Johnny said. "please?"

She looked like she thought on it, then smiled bright and toothy - like someone he knew - and nodded. "For a moment."

Johnny looked around the apartment. It was tiny, but clean and neat, there were wild flowers in a glass on the small kitchen table. He wondered if Daniel had picked them to give to his mom. That would be like him. She walked ahead to a door and opened it. "Hey, honey. You got a visitor."

Johnny walked in and Daniel's mouth fell open a little. He was sitting on his bed in the narrow room, wearing blue jeans and a T-shirt, reading a comic book. "Thanks," Johnny told Daniel's mom, and she closed the door after her.

"Hey uh, what you doing here?"

"Come to pick you up. Prom night tonight. Get ready, get dressed."

"Oh uh, I'm not feeling so well, you know, uh" He leaned the back of his hand to his forehead, made a pitiful face.

"Bet you'll feel better once you get some fresh air." Johnny smiled.

Daniel kind of sucked his teeth. "I'm not going."

"Geeze, Daniel, what are you so mad at me for? What did I do? You won't talk to me, you won't hang out with me. I come all the way down here to pick you up and you'd rather stay in bed reading funny books."

Daniel frowned at him. Then he carefully folded the comic book together, got out of bed, walked up to him, opened his mouth to speak, then changed his mind, walked back. It wasn't too easy to pace in the small room so he settled for kind of rocking on the balls of his feet instead, hands in his pockets, looking down on the floor.

"Look, I'm not sure you wanna hear this, so maybe you should just go, have fun, let's forget about the last weeks ever happening."

"Course I wanna hear it, why else would I have come here?"

Daniel looked up at him, nodded. "Okay. Here's the thing. I'm pretty good at bouncing back and

not taking things personal. But when you kissed me, right on the dance floor, in front of everyone and their cat, without me asking or anything, how's a guy supposed to just bounce back from that like it's nothing? And I know it didn't mean anything to you, and that's fine, it's just, it meant something to *me* Johnny. And then- you and Ali danced to *our* song, at The Bumblebee that night, and it *is* our song Johnny, you can't deny that, because *you* bought it for me, and I didn't ask you to do that either! And it just-" He trailed off, took a deep breath. "I know you're not for me to have, of course I do. And I like Ali, she's just a peach, and I want you two to be happy together and dance and have fun and be prom king and queen and all the good things, truly I do, I just- I just don't want to have to look at it. Okay, Johnny? There. Now I told you." He made a dismissive gesture with his hands.

"Me and Ali aren't going to prom together," Johnny said. "she's going with Greg Hooper."

Daniel looked genuinely confused. "Oh- oh, I'm sorry, Johnny. Her loss. Greg Hooper doesn't know his ass from his elbow. And he's always showing off his balls in the locker room, like a weirdo. They're different sizes. He calls them the egg and the acorn. Which sounds like it should be the name of a restaurant, not Greg Hooper's horrible balls."

"Uhh... well, Greg asked her, I didn't."

A silence. "You didn't? Why not? Geeze, do I have to walk you through everything?"

Johnny took three steps forward which was enough to reach Daniel, and then he curled his finger and used it to tilt Daniel's chin up, and Daniel breathed in and stared up at him with the biggest brown eyes and then Johnny pressed his lips to Daniel's, closed them around that full bottom lip, and Daniel kind of whimpered against him, like a little vibration, reached out to grab his forearms, but he didn't push Johnny away, he just held onto him. Johnny let his arms come up around him, pulled him a little closer, and Daniel went soft in his arms. Then Johnny gave him lots of quick, tiny kisses so Daniel giggled a little incredulous against his mouth, and then Daniel stopped him with a long, firm kiss, let a hand come up in Johnny's hair, parted his lips and took advantage of Johnny drawing a breath to tease at him with the tip of his tongue.

Johnny pulled away, just a little bit, tried to control his breathing. Daniel was kind of stuttering with his breath too.

"Did you mean that one?" Daniel asked.

"Yeah," Johnny said. "I meant it." He swallowed. "I been doing a lot of thinking, Daniel. I figured if I got Ali, then my life would be perfect. Just like in the pictures. Maybe it is, too. Everyone says we look good together. But here's the kicker. Being with you? That's like being in a song. A real good one I mean, like a Ray Charles song. That makes your heart beat faster and your head spin and you didn't even know something could be that good and the moment is over you just wanna play it again, because you don't know what else could cut it. And it's not perfect because he sings kinda broken and he plays kinda wild but it's all the better for it." Johnny took a shaky breath. "I don't know what that means at all. But I think I'd like to find out, if you're willing. So, you coming with me or not?"

A smile, small and tentative at first, grew on Daniel's face til it just about covered it, and he looked up at Johnny. "You're crazy. Danielle might have Encino kids fooled, but I don't think we can pull it off at school."

Johnny touched Daniel's face with gentle fingers. "Come on, just put on a suit and let's go. Trust me?"

Daniel bit his lip, and then he nodded. “Can you wait outside?”

There weren’t many things more awkward than trying to make polite small talk with other people’s parents but Daniel’s mom was egregious and chatty and got him lemonade and complimented his suit and asked him what he was going to do after school ended and how long he’d known Daniel and Johnny just kind of smiled and nodded and answered as good as he could and thought stuff about apples not falling far from trees, when the door opened and Daniel came out in a powder blue suit. Where the hell did he find these outfits.

“Oh, you look *gorgeous!!*” Daniel’s mom enthused, clasping her hands together. “Stay right there, do not move, I’m getting the camera!”

“Ma!”

“Oh hush, it won’t take but a second.” She opened a cupboard and got a camera out. “Johnny, I want you in it too, scoot in.”

Daniel stared at him. “You don’t have to.”

“It’s okay,” Johnny said, stood next to him and put an arm around Daniel's back, rested his hand on his shoulder. Daniel’s mom, grinning, brought the camera to her eye and snapped, the flash went off like lightning. Daniel pressed his eyes together and grimaced.

“Geeze!”

“Oh you’re so handsome! One more, one more.”

“No! We’re gonna be late,” Daniel said, walked over and kissed his mom on the cheek. “see you later.”

“Bye! Have fun!”

"This isn't the way to school," Daniel said, sitting in the passenger seat and rolling up his sleeves. "we going up to your place?"

"Mm."

"Johnny the god damn mystery man. Okay, be that way."

Daniel was right, they did go up to Johnny's place, and Johnny walked ahead into the guest house, and then upstairs into the studio. Then he turned around.

"Hey, close your eyes."

"Uh..."

"Come on. Give me your hand, and I'll lead you."

Daniel sighed, but closed his eyes, and Johnny opened the door to the studio, took both Daniel’s hands in his and walked backwards inside, dragging him along.

“Okay, stand here, don’t open ‘em til I say so.”

“Feels like the famous last words you’d hear someone else say.”

Johnny walked over to the Dansette, put on the single he’d bought earlier that week and dropped

the needle. A real slow and pretty song. It was by two Italian American brothers from New York, he'd have to tell Daniel that, but maybe a little later, he was starting to notice people's eyes glaze over a little when he told them interesting facts about music, so apparently you had to pick your moments. He walked back over to Daniel, who was smiling, listening to the music, that sinuous guitar melody.

"Okay, open up."

Daniel did, looked up at Johnny, still smiling a little unsure, and then he looked around, and then his mouth fell open. He took in the way Johnny had decorated the studio with balloons and streamers, how he had a table decked with bowls of popcorn and punch. Johnny bit his lip. Making things look pretty wasn't really his forte. He hoped it didn't look like a kid's birthday party.

"It's supposed to look like a prom," he explained quickly, in case Daniel was confused.

"Yeah- yeah I got that. It's uh. Wow, Johnny."

"So uh- wanna dance with me, Daniel?" He reached out a hand.

Daniel grinned wide and took it. "Thought you'd never ask."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading :)
Here's a playlist inspired by it and here's a little Danielle vignette.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!